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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0155
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RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4442
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000592

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: VIOLENCE, VERBIAGE THREATEN GENEVA TALKS

REF: A. COLOMBO 148

[B](#). COLOMBO 543

[C](#). OSLO 467

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)
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[1](#). (U) Summary: After a brief moratorium on violence following the late January announcement of the first round of Geneva talks (Ref A), the all-too-regrettable pattern of tit-for-tat bloodshed between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its armed rivals has resumed with a vengeance. Following the April 7 assassination of a pro-LTTE Tamil politician and a reported assault on an LTTE camp in Trincomalee, the LTTE launched a series of isolated, small-scale attacks on government security forces, bringing the death toll to as many as thirty in just five days. Overshadowing the violence on the ground is an unhelpful war of words between key members of the government and the departing head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that has left Norwegian facilitator and International Development Minister Erik Solheim "hopping mad," according to Hans Brattskar, Oslo's envoy in Colombo. The volatile situation, exacerbated by a stand-off between the LTTE and the government over transportation of LTTE cadres, puts the impending second round of talks in Geneva, slated for April 19-21, in increasing jeopardy. End summary.

VIOLENCE ON BOTH SIDES:
SERIES OF ATTACKS IN NORTH AND EAST

[2](#). (C) After the January 25 announcement of February 21-23 talks in Geneva between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), there was a brief moratorium on the tit-for-tat violence that has made the four-year-old Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) increasingly fragile. In the hiatus between the first round of talks-- in which the LTTE committed to stop attacks on Sri Lankan Government and military targets and the GSL promised to constrain "armed groups" in GSL-controlled areas--the regrettable pattern of attack and counter-attack appears to have resumed. On April 7 Vanniasingham Vigneswaran, a pro-LTTE politician nominated by the Tamil National Alliance

(TNA) to fill the parliamentary slot left by the Christmas eve assassination of Joseph Pararajasigham, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in downtown Trincomalee in broad daylight. Also on April 7 two Muslim home guards were shot and killed as they returned home in Welikanda--a supposed anti-LTTE Karuna faction stronghold--near Batticaloa. On April 8 a Tiger camp in an LTTE-controlled part of Trincomalee was attacked by suspected members of the Karuna faction. While some reports claimed that eight LTTE cadres were killed, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) representative Helen Olafsdottir told poloff the LTTE had reported no/no casualties in the attack.

13. (U) In a style all too reminiscent of the December-January spike in violence just before the first round of Geneva talks, the LTTE launched a series of rapid, small-scale attacks against GSL security forces. On April 8 a claymore mine explosion in the northern district of Jaffna injured one Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldier and one civilian, while another attack the same day at an army installation in Trincomalee killed one soldier and injured another. Two days later the Tigers struck again in Jaffna, this time killing five soldiers in a second claymore mine explosion. Two local civilian aid workers who were passing by were also killed. On April 11 the Tigers detonated another claymore mine as a bus carrying Navy personnel returning home for the Sri Lankan New Year holidays traveled along a main road in Trincomalee, killing 11 sailors, the civilian driver, and wounding two British citizens who were traveling in another vehicle nearby. On the morning of April 12, a claymore mine attack on a police vehicle just north of Trincomalee killed two policemen and injured two more.

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14. (SBU) Some sources speculated that the April 11 claymore attack in Trincomalee was "payback" for Vigneswaran's murder. Eyewitnesses reportedly said that they observed the assailants fleeing toward a nearby naval base. On April 11, a gang--reportedly instigated by the Marxist, Sinhalese nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)--attacked TNA parliamentarian N. Raviraj's car as he was returning from Vigneswaran's funeral in Trincomalee. The military spokesman told us the following day that Raviraj sustained minor injuries, perhaps due to broken glass from damage to the car, and that police had arrested some perpetrators of the attack.

GSL CRITICISM OF NORWAY AND SLMM

15. (C) The violence in the north and the east has been accompanied, unfortunately, by a war of words between the GSL on one hand and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and Norwegian peace process facilitators on the other. Since the February talks, the SLMM has delivered in private weekly progress reports on cease-fire violations to both parties, and the GSL has bristled at SLMM's assessment that it has failed to disarm groups operating in areas under its control. Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa (the younger brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa), in a strongly-worded note, leaked to the press and reported on April 2, all but accused out-going SLMM head Hagrup Haukland of fabricating reports of sightings and contacts with "armed groups" in the east. Rajapaksa also accused Haukland of referring to the Tigers as "freedom fighters" in a recent meeting and stating that the GSL could not beat the LTTE in an armed conflict.

16. (U) In response, Haukland wrote a response to the Defense Secretary, which was likewise leaked and was reported in the

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local press April 9, that denied these allegations, clarifying that Haukland had said that neither the GSL nor the LTTE could achieve a military victory. Haukland's letter

criticized the Defense Secretary and asserted that irresponsible journalism (e.g., the publication of Rajapaksa's correspondence with him) undermines the peace process. Determined to have the last word, Rajapaksa answered with further inflammatory rhetoric.

¶7. (C) Jumping into the fray, Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera also gave an April 8 news interview criticizing the SLMM and blaming Norway for "welcoming" the Tigers on a visit following the first round of Geneva talks. (Note: The Foreign Minister claims the interviewers cut out remarks he made supportive of Norway. End note.) In a discussion with the Ambassador, Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar said Minister for International Development and peace process facilitator Erik Solheim was "hopping mad" about the GSL's public attacks on the SLMM and the Norwegians. Brattskar also commented that newly named Norwegian special envoy, Jon Hanssen-Bauer, during his recent visit to Sri Lanka, had had a "disturbing" meeting with Defense Secretary Rajapaksa, in which Rajapaksa asserted that a war against the LTTE was "winnable." (Note: Sri Lankan military briefers have reportedly made similar assertions recently to local diplomats and defense attaches.)

TRANSPORTATION STAND-OFF IN LEAD-UP TO GENEVA TWO

¶8. (C) In addition to the escalating violence and the GSL's ill-advised saber-rattling with the SLMM, a third point of contention threatens the increasingly dim prospects for the second round of talks. Co-Chair representatives from Norway, Japan, and the European Union (EU) traveled to LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi on April 10 to press the LTTE to halt attacks on GSL security targets and uphold the commitments made in Geneva in February. The representatives reported that the LTTE demanded the GSL provide transportation--via GSL military helicopter--to allow cadres from the north and east to meet prior to Geneva Two. In an

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April 10 meeting, new peace secretariat (SCOPP) deputy head (and former Tamil paramilitary) Kethesh Loganathan told the Ambassador that while the Sri Lankan military has provided such support in the past, even though it is not required to do so under the CFA, it refuses to do so now, and the civilian leadership is not ordering the military to provide the transport. The GSL countered the LTTE's request with an offer to provide an air-conditioned ferry, but the Tigers refused. Some observers have commented that the transportation squabble has become a point of honor for both sides--with neither side appearing prepared to budge.

¶9. (C) In an April 12 meeting, Swiss Emboff Martin Sturzinger told DCM that the Tigers may refuse to attend the second round of talks in Geneva unless the GSL gives way on this demand. Sturzinger added that the Swiss had given both parties an April 12 deadline to confirm their attendance at the Geneva talks. In reality, however, his government will continue to be flexible for at least a few more days to avoid being in a situation in which both sides (finally) decide to attend only to have the hosts tell them they have RSVP'd too late. In Sturzinger's view, the talks are "very much in doubt" since his recent discussions with members of the LTTE hierarchy indicate that the Tigers are willing to go to the mat on the transportation issue, while the GSL almost certainly cannot accede to the "request" after the attacks of the last few days.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Prospects for the second round of talks beginning on April 19, always tenuous, look grimmer than ever. The LTTE wanted one thing to happen in the two months since the first

round: for the GSL to disarm the Karuna faction. The Tigers can't be surprised that didn't happen--nor can the GSL be surprised that the SLMM is taking it to task for failing to do so. The Tigers now seem to be looking for a pretext to bail out of Geneva. The Tigers' speedy abandonment of their Geneva commitments--and the rapid descent of the north and east back to the pre-Geneva level of violence--is a grim indication of sign of their appetite for re-engaging on the peace process. The situation is further strained by the GSL's public posturing against Norway and the SLMM. The GSL is happy to see the SLMM take a strong stance against LTTE cease fire violations, but loath to admit its own failure to disarm factions that, in essence, assist the GSL by attacking the LTTE. The events of the past week pose a threat, not only to the prospect of Geneva Two talks, but to greater efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to this lengthy conflict.

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